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## Dan Curran: Grateful for the Gift of Life

University of Dayton

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# News

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TUESDAY OCTOBER 30, 2018

# Dan Curran: Grateful for the Gift of Life

In a hilarious moment at a celebration dinner on campus more than two years ago, outgoing University of Dayton president Dan Curran poked fun at himself when he discovered a disturbing fact while perusing the wall of presidential portraits in St. Mary's Hall.

Measuring with his hands and squeezing in sideways beside Brother Ray Fitz, S.M., he exclaimed in [a video](#), "Wait a minute, there's no room for mine! They'll have to draw me real skinny."

Fast forward to today. In his first trip back to Dayton, after spending seven weeks in intensive care in a Philadelphia hospital following an April 13 liver transplant surgery, he gazed quietly at the rearranged wall of oil paintings of UD presidents throughout history.

"He (artist Seth Wade) caught the smile," he said appreciatively. Then he quipped, "It looks like me — goofy. But I'm a little too tan. It looks like Ray and I spent a lot of time in Florida together."

The last six months have been anything but a walk on the beach for Curran, who led UD for 14 years with energy, drive, tenacity — and, for those who worked closely with him, a measure of impatience. For a man who often stretched his legs during overly long administrative meetings and earned a reputation for quick, intuitive decisions, a lengthy stretch in a hospital bed and months of grueling rehabilitation where he struggled to walk, talk and eat again were "hellish," he said candidly.

"The doctors said this was one of the most difficult recoveries they've ever seen," he said. "I went through three operations in 10 days, with the transplant being the last resort. I almost died three times." Even though his body didn't reject the new liver, at different points during his recovery, he experienced a seizure and heart failure.

Diagnosed with a rare autoimmune liver disease — primary sclerosing cholangitis — more than a decade ago, Curran underwent tests at the Cleveland Clinic and Mayo Clinic and began taking medicine to control the inflammation and scarring of his bile ducts.

“My liver enzymes were telling — often off the charts — but I didn’t feel bad. About 10 years ago my primary care doctor said, ‘You have a transplant in your future,’ but I totally disregarded it. In the summer before my transplant, I taught for months in China and toured with students, even climbing mountains. I had no pain, nothing.”

But when life goes south, it can go downhill quickly. On a return trip from Shanghai that fall, the veins burst in his esophagus — a sign of the disease’s progression. That led to six months of various surgeries and treatments until, finally, it became clear a liver transplant was his last hope. His doctors in Dayton and Philadelphia recommended Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, one of the top in the country for the complex surgery that, in Curran’s case, spanned more than 10 hours.

“My kidneys and other organs were shutting down in the hospital when I was matched with a liver donor in a day and a half. It was a miracle,” he said quietly.

Curran is extremely grateful to the organ donor and the donor’s family for giving him the gift of life and encourages “everyone to think seriously, if they have not already, about becoming a donor.”

Today, Curran’s liver enzymes “are perfect,” and he’s gained back 25 pounds on his still-slim 6’ 3” frame. And while he concedes his “walking pace is not as quick as it once was,” he’s reclaiming life. Three weeks ago he attended his 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion in Philadelphia and “heard all the embellished stories about me as an out-of-control kid,” he recalled with a laugh. In Dayton, he posed for a selfie with his successor Eric Spina and was spotted wearing an A-10 cap at First Watch in Kettering at breakfast with community leaders Jeff Hoagland and JP Nauseef. With his family, he

drove by the former NCR corporate headquarters, a purchase he spearheaded during his presidency, to see its new sign: Daniel J. Curran Place.

The health scare has changed Curran's perspective on life: "I ran so hard for so long," he said, "but I now accept my mortality."

On the road to recovery, he received hundreds of letters, cards, emails, texts and phone calls from colleagues, university presidents, high school friends, trustees — even Dayton Flyers legend Bucky Bockhorn, who's called men's basketball games on the radio for nearly half a century. Family and friends stood vigil by his bedside for weeks.

"It was overwhelming, humbling," Curran said. "How can I ever repay those who gave up so much to help me?"

One card, with a surprise thank-you note from a staff member he met at a campus reception years ago, stands out. "Sometimes you don't realize that something you once said can touch someone else," he reflected. "You realize little kindnesses make a big difference in people's lives.

"You realize," he said, "what love's about and how expansive it is."

-- By Teri Rizvi

*(For those considering becoming an organ donor, learn more [here](#). For those who would like to share a card or letter, please send to: Dr. Dan Curran, c/o Albert Emanuel Hall Room 223, University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio 45469-1323.)*

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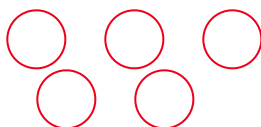
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